

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT: “What Shall I

Do? What Shall I Do?”: Bearing Witness to Trauma In Literature Or An Epistemic

Understanding of Trauma Informed Literacy

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This project develops an understanding of trauma theory at the intersections of traumatic religious systems and the experiences of Queer, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color within these systems. Making use of the collected works of James Baldwin, I place him in conversation with trauma scholars from multiple disciplines, most notably the intersectional considerations and feminist modes of thought in the scholarship of trauma of Shelly Rambo, Michelle Panchuk, Theresa Tobin, and Dawne Moon. Our approach to narratives and testimonies affects our capacity to bear witness to the experiences of victims, and through my intersectional and polyvocal understanding of the retellings of trauma, I illustrate how the mode of inquiry necessary to effectively witness must include the flexibility to understand dynamic and complex performative utterances that attempt speech acts vital to survivor autonomy. Iterations of narrative perform acts of speech that are directed in their perlocution at both the speaker and their audience, and to situate texts in this mode addresses the full range of meaning that a written narrative can have in the healing process for the impacted victim and collective. I will show how the philosophical approaches to the lived experiences of survivors of religious abuse are best

understood through a framework of narrative healing and the complications caused by the complex epistemic injustices posed by a religiously traumatic system.